

## **The Rail & Roads Campaign** **Improving Mobility in Salt Lake and Utah Counties**

### **The Transportation Need**

The Wasatch Front is facing a very real transportation crisis. Despite major improvements -- including the reconstruction of I-15 several years ago and the success of TRAX light rail -- the region's transportation needs are growing faster than our ability to meet them. One primary reason for this is population growth. Utah is one of the fastest growing states in the country, doubling the average national growth rate through the 1990s. The population boom continues, with another one million people projected along the Wasatch Front by 2030. And 75% of our population growth is coming from within, as our children and grandchildren seek to stay and enjoy the educational, economic and quality of life opportunities Utah offers.

Utahns are also driving more. From 1990 to 2002, vehicle miles traveled increased by 66 percent. This is almost twice the rate of population growth (36 percent), and severely outpaced increases in highway capacity (12 percent). At these growth rates, the amount of time we spend delayed in traffic congestion will *triple* in the next 25 years.

Increased congestion poses a significant threat to Utah's current and future economic vitality. Traffic congestion increases the cost of doing business with longer delivery times, reduced productivity, lost time of employees stuck in traffic, less efficient travel and increased fuel usage. As the cost of doing business goes up, the increases are passed along to customers in the form of higher prices for goods and services.

Growing congestion and increased business costs reduce Utah's competitiveness with other regions and negatively impacts our economic growth. Transportation and mobility is one of the primary factors businesses evaluate when considering where to locate, and having an efficient, multi-modal transportation system will help keep Utah attractive and competitive. For example, in the Denver area, the Chamber of Commerce reports that new business prospects have tripled since voters passed *FasTracks*, a \$4 billion program of rail projects to be completed by 2016.

Investing in our transportation infrastructure will also help fuel Utah's future economic growth. A study conducted by the Bureau of Business and Economic Research at the University of Utah titled, *Economic and Demographic Impacts of Federal Financed Transportation Infrastructure on the Wasatch Front*, determined that building recommended highway and transit projects could bring as much as \$4.2 billion in additional federal money to Utah by 2030. That \$4.2 billion will create almost 4,000 new jobs and add \$212 million to the state's economy each year.

We must address our transportation needs sooner, not later, in order to protect Utah's economy and quality of life. Building an efficient highway and transit system will increase mobility, improve air quality, strengthen major employment centers, increase Utah's economic competitiveness with other regions, bolster our local economy and generate additional revenue to fund other state programs.

### **An Opportunity to Act**

This election season, thanks to years of work by local governments and the Utah Legislature, voters in Salt Lake and Utah counties have an opportunity to do something about the transportation crisis. By voting for Proposition 3 in Salt Lake County and for the rail and roads Opinion Question in Utah County, a significant infusion of funding will flow to highway corridor preservation, FrontRunner commuter rail, expansion of TRAX light rail, and other highway projects.

A positive vote on the two ballot proposals will mean an additional quarter-cent sales tax will be invested in transportation infrastructure. It will be an on-going, growing source of revenue for transportation, amounting to billions of dollars over many years.

### **Years of Research and Study**

The Nov. 7 vote is the culmination of long study and effort by elected officials from the Legislature, the Wasatch Front Regional Council (WFRC) and the Mountainland Association of Governments (MAG). Local officials have studied the serious transportation needs facing the region, with an eye to build a region-wide rail transit system, along with critical highway projects. The officials created the "Transit 2030" committee, which over a two-year period identified top-priority highway and transit projects that were ultimately adopted into the Long Range Plan in 2003.

The elected officials on the Transit 2030 committee also evaluated available funding alternatives to complete the critical highway and transit projects identified. With respect to transit, the first phase of the WFRC and MAG long-range plans identify \$2.1 billion needed to build the projects by 2015. Current revenue sources will generate only \$600 million, leaving \$1.5 billion in unfunded needs.

The committee carefully studied and evaluated many possible funding sources for both highways and transit. With input from UDOT, UTA, the Utah League of Cities and Towns, elected officials evaluated the potential revenue and ramifications from:

- |                        |                                                     |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| - Gas taxes            | - Inflationary component to gas tax                 |
| - Sales tax on fuel    | - Vehicle registration / license fees               |
| - Impact fees on roads | - Registration fees based on vehicle miles traveled |
| - Real estate taxes    | - Special Improvement Districts                     |
| - Property taxes       | - Sales taxes                                       |

### **The Legislature Examines the Need**

Meanwhile, the Transportation Planning Task Force was created by the Legislature during the 2003 General Session with H.B. 310 "Transportation Planning Task Force." For two years, the Task Force studied transportation issues and needs statewide and on November 10, 2004, made its final report to the Transportation Interim Committee. The report articulated several fundamental principles to guide transportation policy decision making, including:

- **Funding Diversification:** over-reliance on a few traditional funding sources will not produce the revenue needed nor spread the tax burden fairly – the state must broaden the base for which transportation systems are funded.
- **Transit Funding:** transit is a necessary transportation option. Currently authorized revenue tools, including sales tax and property tax, should be exercised before new revenue sources are considered.
- **Funding Stability:** transportation projects require stable and reliable long-term transportation funding that can be clearly identified by policy makers and transportation planners.

### **The Business Community Gets Involved**

The Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce, recognizing the link between transportation and economic development, has engaged the business community in finding and advocating solutions. In November 2004, the Chamber announced its five *Economic Strategic Initiatives*, identifying transportation as one of its critical priorities to foster economic, cultural and social growth. Recommending the expedited construction of highway and transit projects, on November 23, 2004 the Chamber adopted a *Resolution on Mobility*, pledging its "partnership with the Utah Legislature in identifying funding solutions to our mobility problems."

On December 15, 2004, the Chamber hosted a "Mobility Summit," which was attended by more than 200 local business, political and community leaders. Chamber President Lane Beattie, local pollster Dan Jones and West Valley City Mayor Dennis Nordfelt outlined the growing crisis and the need to

find the funding to build critical transportation projects. Rich Walje, Executive Vice President of Utah Power, and Keith Rattie, President and CEO of Questar Corporation emphasized the increasing costs of business due to congestion and the need to find solutions.

A year later, in October 2005, Governor Huntsman's office hosted a second Transportation Summit, attended by more than 150 political, business and community leaders. Members of Utah's Congressional delegation, the Legislature, local government, Chambers of Commerce, transportation agencies and other stakeholders participated in a discussion of Utah's transportation crisis and the unfunded highway and transit needs. Results of an informal online survey conducted by the Governor's office in anticipation of the summit reported that 82% of respondents are concerned about transportation and 83% support expanding transit.

The Salt Lake Chamber also created The 2015 Alliance whose mission is to accelerate the build-out of key transportation projects by 2015, rather than 2030. The Alliance commissioned an independent study, confirming the need to boost transportation funding for priority projects or risk a diminished quality of life and reduced economic vitality.

## **The Legislature Acts**

### **Crucial Highway Projects**

#### **The Success of Transit**

In 2005, a record number of Utahns used transit. More than 36 million trips were taken last year on UTA's bus, light rail, paratransit and vanpool services. The last time transit ridership was at this level was post-World War II, when a record peak of 33 million trips was recorded in 1946.

Largely fueling these record-breaking ridership levels is the success of light rail. Since the first TRAX line opened in December 1999, ridership is exceeding projections by more than double. The Sandy/Salt Lake Line and the University Line - originally projected to carry a combined total of 21,000 daily riders - are currently carrying more than 55,000 riders each weekday.

TRAX ridership continues to see double-digit increases each year. In 2005, ridership increased 13.5% over 2004, providing almost 13 million rides. And as the cost of gasoline skyrocketed through the summer and fall of 2005, UTA saw a dramatic increase in ridership as people turned to transit as a less expensive option. The number of average weekday passengers on TRAX rose 20 percent in October, 45 percent in November and 46 percent in December, compared to the corresponding months the previous year. The high ridership has continued into 2006: year-to-date through April, TRAX ridership is up 35% over the same months last year.

These ridership figures demonstrate that transit is having an effect on mobility and congestion. A comparison of light rail ridership with traffic counts on I-15 reveals that TRAX is carrying approximately 20% percent of weekday work trips to downtown Salt Lake City. During peak commute hours, that equals one lane of traffic on I-15. And in more defined markets, light rail is making an even greater impact, currently accounting for 30 percent of weekday student trips to the University of Utah, 50% of employees at the LDS Church Office Building, and 60% of employees at Beneficial Life.

#### **The Projects & Schedule**

The first phase of the WFRM Long Range Plan in Salt Lake County includes four light rail projects: the Mid-Jordan Line, the West Valley Line, the Airport Line and the Draper extension. The sales tax increase approved in 2000 by voters in Salt Lake, Davis and Weber Counties provided funding to

complete these four projects in 30 years. But with a desire among local elected officials to accelerate the projects, it is possible these lines could be in operation by 2014 if funding is provided.

#### **Mid-Jordan Line**

- 10.1 miles
- Eight proposed stations
- 15-minute frequency
- Projected ridership of 25,000-30,000 in 2025
- If accelerated: open for service in 2010
- Estimated cost: \$335 - \$370 million

#### **Airport Line**

- 5.5 miles
- Five proposed stations
- Extends from Delta Center to Airport
- Projected ridership of 6,000-9,000 in 2025
- If accelerated: open for service in 2013
- Estimated cost: \$250 - \$290 million

#### **West Valley Line**

- 5.1 miles
- Four proposed stations
- 15-minute frequency
- Projected ridership of 9,000-12,000 in 2025
- If accelerated: open for service in 2012
- Estimated cost: \$250 - \$290 million

#### **Draper Extension**

- 7.0 miles
- Stations to be determined
- Extends from TRAX in Sandy to Draper
- Projected ridership of 7,000-10,000 in 2025
- If accelerated: open for service in 2014
- Estimated cost: \$235 - \$260 million

As local elected officials have been studying options for accelerating projects in the Long Range Plan, UTA has responded by moving forward with the necessary environmental, engineering and design work. The preliminary environmental and engineering work is almost complete on these projects, and if funding is approved to accelerate the plan, all four projects could be *under construction within one year and open for service by 2014*, significantly accelerating the schedule as follows:

	<u>Current Funding</u>	<u>Increased Funding</u>
• Mid-Jordan Line	2014	<b>2010</b>
• West Valley Line	2021	<b>2012</b>
• Airport Line	2030	<b>2013</b>
• Draper Extension	2025	<b>2014</b>

Under the accelerated schedule, the cost to build the four projects is approximately \$1.25 billion. Current estimates indicate this will save taxpayers \$610 million (50%) in construction costs.

#### **Conclusion: Pay Now or Pay Later**

The transportation needs are real. The Wasatch Front population is projected to double by 2030. In a September 2005 poll conducted by Dan Jones & Associates, 74% of Salt Lake County residents stated that "traffic congestion is a serious problem." Eighty-one percent (81%) said "traffic congestion is getting worse." At current funding levels, congestion will triple in the next 25 years. Our economic growth will be affected as business costs increase, productivity decreases and Utah becomes a less desirable place for businesses to locate.

The benefits of investing in transportation are also real. Funding to purchase top-priority highway rights-of-way is desperately needed, especially for the Mountain View Corridor. Highway mitigation projects in Utah County are crucial to prepare for I-15 rebuild in the county.

With increased funding, the four light rail projects in Salt Lake County can be operational by 2014. Accelerating the transit projects will reduce construction costs by 50%, saving taxpayers more than \$600 million. The TRAX system will more than double, with 28 miles of new light rail. A majority of Salt Lake County residents will be within three miles of a rail line, and bus routes will be realigned to better serve other areas and support the light rail system. These transit projects will provide transportation options to residents, and the increased mobility will support our economic growth and help maintain Utah's quality of life.

Community leaders have come to the table. Much work has been done over the past few years as local and state elected officials, the business community, planning organizations, transportation planners and other stakeholders have partnered in an unprecedented fashion to identify critical highway and transit needs and develop viable funding solutions.

Now the public can weigh in by voting on Nov. 7.